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The Queen's Blood: A Study of Family Ties during the Wars of the Roses

Helen Shears
University of Puget Sound

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As mother and daughter, Elizabeth Woodville and Elizabeth of York endured together some of the most dangerous and uncertain phases of the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485). However, the posthumous images of these women couldn't be more different. Elizabeth Woodville is remembered as a haughty, greedy queen who recklessly elevated her huge family to the detriment of the realm. Although recently there has been a wave of historical study aimed at exonerating the entire Woodville clan, including Elizabeth, from the accusations of unbridled greed, their reputation as acquisitive *parvenus* still remains.[1] Meanwhile, historians have immortalized Elizabeth of York as the beautiful and benevolent queen of Henry VII (king from 1485 to 1509) and the foundress of the Tudor Dynasty.[2] This difference in their images, however, may be partly because there are significantly fewer extant sources available that concern Elizabeth of York, particularly regarding any political action she undertook as queen. As a result, the majority of work that has been done on her emphasizes the social aspects of her life as queen of

1. The following sources provide excellent overviews of Elizabeth Woodville, her family, her life as queen, and her political career. A.F Sutton and Lydia Visser-Fuchs, "The Device of Queen Elizabeth Woodville: A Gillyflower or Pink," in *The Ricardian* 11 (March 1997): 17-24; Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs,"A 'Most Benevolent Queen': Queen Elizabeth Woodville's Reputation, her Piety and her Books," in *The Ricardian 10* (June 1995): 214 – 245; Anne Crawford, *The Yorkists: The History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007); Anne Crawford, "The King's Burden?: The Consequences of Royal Marriage in Fifteenth-century England," in *Patronage The Crown and The Provinces in Later Medieval England*, ed. by Ralph. A Griffiths (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1981); Arlene Okerlund, *Elizabeth: England's Slandered Queen*. (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2006); David Baldwin, *Elizabeth Woodville: Mother of the Princes in the Tower* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2002); J.L Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445 – 1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). J.R. Lander, "Marriage and Politics in the Fifteenth Century: the Nevilles and the Wydevilles," in *Crown and Nobility, 1450-1509* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976) 94-126; Michael Hicks, "The Changing Role of the Wydevilles in Yorkist Politics to 1483." in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. Charles Ross. (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Rowman & Littlefield, 1979), 61-86.

2. For more information on Elizabeth of York, the following sources highlight the social and political aspects of Elizabeth of York's life, encompassing her childhood as a princess of England and her experiences as queen. Anne Crawford, *The Yorkists: The History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007); Anne Crawford, "The King's Burden?: The Consequences of Royal Marriage in Fifteenth-century England," in *Patronage The Crown and The Provinces in Later Medieval England*, ed. by Ralph. A Griffiths (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1981). 33-56;Arlene Naylor Okerlund, *Elizabeth of York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); J.L Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445 – 1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Nancy Lenz Harvey, *Elizabeth of York, Mother of Henry VIII* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc., 1973).

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England, not her political power, while historians have been able to make more definitive statements about her mother's political influence using the sources available for her career as queen of Edward IV (king from 1461 to 1470, and 1471 to 1483).

Although Elizabeth of York was much less politically active than her mother, she was always a theoretically more politically powerful woman. While Elizabeth Woodville came from the lowest ranks of the English nobility, Elizabeth of York was the daughter of Edward IV and a princess in her own right. Her ancestry alone held significant implications for Henry VII, as a challenger to Richard III and as king of England. Elizabeth of York, therefore, despite being less politically active than her mother, did provide certain political ramifications for her husband. In this sense, Elizabeth Woodville and Elizabeth of York are similar; both of these queen's families and their familial connections wrought significant political consequences for their husbands. Elizabeth Woodville and her family's unpopularity ultimately contributed to Richard III's usurpation of the throne, while Elizabeth of York's royal lineage considerably strengthened Henry VII's claim to the English throne and his early years as king.

The study of queenship has expanded significantly in the last few decades, particularly regarding the role of the queen to complement the king, and the potential benefits and burdens—political and familial—that a queen brought to her husband. While late medieval queens were chosen based on a series of criteria, a potential bride's family was always implicitly considered, since the choice was one of the most sensitive diplomatic nature.[3] The implications of this family differed depending on if a queen was foreign or not. A foreign queen could bring potential alliances to her husband's country,[4] while a native born queen might further elevate an already powerful family and link them more closely to the throne which might threaten the security of the king and the succession of his chosen heir. However, a native born queen's family connections could also prove useful to a king.[5] As J.L Laynesmith has recently

3. J.L Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445 – 1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36.

4. Laynesmith, 42.

5. Laynesmith, 193.

asserted, "Through her elevation to queenship, a woman's status within her natal family had altered so that she was in a position superior to that of her parents...and potentially able to further their interests and those of her siblings."[6] A queen had many resources at her disposal for elevating her family members, and a reasonable expectation existed that she use them. However, these opportunities exemplified a tension between the major relationships in a queen's life. As C.T Wood points out, medieval women "were the daughters of one family but the wives and mothers of another, with the result that they understood themselves, and were understood by society, within the context of a dual kinship relationship."[7] These potentially conflicting relationships could feasibly present a real challenge to a king, since his queen might be faced with a dilemma if these obligations to two different families came into conflict or if she saw it as her duty to consistently support all families to which she belonged. Another implication of this promotion of the queen's family was the potential relationship formed between her children and her natal family, particularly the male heirs, which could upset other members of court who sought influence with the king's family. In this context, both Elizabeth Woodville and Elizabeth of York provide interesting case studies. The experiences of these two queens illustrate the full impact a queen's family could have on her husband's kingship.

In Elizabeth Woodville's case, the implications her family would have on the reign of Edward IV, as well as on the brief reign of his son, would ultimately contribute to the political tension and divisions in England that enabled Richard III to usurp his nephew's crown so easily. Although the true nature of the Woodville clan's influence over English politics during this time period continues to be debated by historians, many scholars do agree that Edward IV's unpopular marriage to Elizabeth Woodville and the rise of the Woodville family had a profound effect on his reign as well as the events following his death.[8]

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6. Laynesmith, 218.

7. C.T Wood, "The First Two Queens Elizabeth," in *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. by L.O Fradenburg, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992,) 127.

8. Charles Ross, *Edward IV* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), 102-103; Charles Ross, Richard III, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), 35; Michael Hicks, "The Changing Role of the Wydevilles in Yorkist Politics to 1483," in

There were several reasons Elizabeth and her family were so unpopular. Elizabeth's own unpopularity took root almost immediately due to the circumstances of her marriage. She and Edward IV were married in secret on May 1, 1464. The clandestine marriage wasn't revealed to the public until September.[9] Dominic Mancini, a Benedictine monk in the employ of Angelo Cato, a renowned scholar, wrote an account of Edward IV's reign and Richard III's usurpation in the late fifteenth century. As he was actually in England for the first half of the year 1483, his account provides a valuable perspective.[10] Mancini described the initial animosity towards the marriage as a product of the "antagonism of the magnates of the kingdom, who disdained to show royal honours towards an undistinguished woman promoted to such exalted rank."[11] Although Mancini's record does reveal a marked bias against the Woodville family, his observation that many nobles were upset that Edward IV had married a woman of relatively low birth accurately reflects the traditions of the time period regarding queens. Laynesmith provides context for Mancini's impression by using Elizabeth Woodville as a case study with which to examine the various criteria involved in the selection of a queen. These standards entailed that she was of a high social status (which would also connote beauty and a high moral character), a virgin, and able to bring foreign support to England in times of need.[12] The two previous queens of England, Katherine of Valois and Margaret of Anjou fulfilled these requirements (both of them were French royalty). But Elizabeth was not a foreign bride, nor was she from a particularly powerful noble family, and she was not a virgin (she had already two children from her first marriage). With the choice of Elizabeth Woodville as his queen, Laynesmith notes "He [Edward IV] had apparently rejected all the potential endorsements of his kingship that a wife

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Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England, ed. Charles Ross (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Rowman & Littlefield, 1979), 61-86.

9. Polydore Vergil, *Three Books of English History Comprising of the Reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III,* ed. Sir Henry Ellis, K.H. (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son, 1844), 117.

10. Dominic Mancini, *The Usurpation of Richard III,* ed. C.A.J. Armstrong (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 3, 9.

11. Mancini, 61.

12. Laynesmith, 62.

could bring."[13] Elizabeth Woodville was, in short, a shocking choice for a queen. Mancini's remark in this context serves as an example of the astonishment the English nobility would have felt at hearing the news of such an unusual marriage, and their dismay that Edward IV had sacrificed all the benefits of an "ideal" bride for a widowed mother five years his senior. The marriage from the start was not regarded as an excellent match, and Elizabeth Woodville was not welcomed as queen of England by many of her new subjects.

In addition, the common perception of her personality and her relationship with Edward IV and her family also served to increase Elizabeth's unpopularity. Essentially, she was perceived as a greedy and single-minded promoter of her family's political interests, using Edward IV and her marriage merely as a tool to increase the Woodville influence. Elizabeth came from a very large family with Lancastrian sympathies. She was the oldest of fifteen children (eight girls, seven boys), at least thirteen of whom survived to adulthood.[14] The elevation of her family in the late 1460's was achieved mostly through the marriages of these siblings and cousins to other (higher) members of the nobility, although some appointments to higher positions in government or at court were made as well.[15] Charles Ross describes these marriages as "so rapid and numerous as temporarily to corner the aristocratic marriage market."[16] These marriages effectively linked the Woodvilles to several other powerful noble families in England. As a Woodville, Elizabeth was perceived to be the driving force behind these marriages, and while it is true she played an important role in raising up her family, Edward IV's own political agenda should not be forgotten, as J.R Lander has pointed out.[17] For example, after he became king, Edward IV pursued a

13. Laynesmith, 62.

14. Arlene Naylor Okerlund, *Elizabeth of York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 45-46.

15. For a detailed description of the Woodville marriages, see Michael Hicks, "The Changing Role of the Wydevilles in Yorkist Politics to 1483," in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. Charles Ross (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Rowman & Littlefield, 1979), 61-86.

16. Ross, *Edward IV*, 93.

17. J.R Lander, "Marriage and Politics in the Fifteenth Century: the Nevilles and the Wydevilles," in *Crown and Nobility, 1450-1509* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1976), 112-113.

policy of reconciliation with the Lancastrians who had fought against him. It was convenient that he married a woman who came from a large family with Lancastrian connections.[18] Their promotion was therefore politically valuable to Edward IV as a new king, a very public sign to other Lancastrians in England that he was willing to let bygones be bygones.

Furthermore, Elizabeth Woodville was perceived by the other English nobility to have led Edward IV astray, as Polydore Vergil indicated in his *Three Books of English History* when he recorded the reaction of the noblemen to the news of the marriage. Vergil was an Italian historian commissioned by Henry VII in the early sixteenth century to write a history of England. Thus he was writing many years after Elizabeth's marriage had taken place. According to Vergil, "they [the other nobility] found muche fault with him in that mariage, and imputyd the same to his dishonor, as the thing wherunto he was led by blynde affection, and not bye reule of reason."[19] Almost immediately, Elizabeth Woodville was regarded as a negative influence on her husband's ability to govern as king of England, particularly as the royal court became heavily populated with her Woodville relatives. Charles Ross described the Woodvilles as "seem[ing] to possess an overweening influence with the king," a phrase that accurately highlights the opinion that surrounded the relationship between Edward IV and his wife's family.[20] As Elizabeth was queen, her Woodville relatives were naturally brought to a position of almost instant familiarity with the king. They also utilized their newfound power, as Mancini mentions Elizabeth and her family "attracted to her party many strangers and introduced them to court, so that they alone should manage the public and private businesses of the crown...."[21]Elizabeth Woodville came to represent all the interests of her detested family. She became a target for the anger of the other nobles who resented the rapid influx of Woodvilles as much as they were upset at their king's rash decision to marry a lowborn widow, and as a result, was disliked almost as much as her family.

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18. Anne Crawford, *The Yorkists: The History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 80.

19. Vergil, *Three Books*, 117.

20. Ross, *Richard III*, 12.

21. Mancini, 65.

The unpopularity of Elizabeth Woodville and her family had serious ramifications for Elizabeth's husband, her son, and the general course for the Wars of the Roses. It was their closeness to the King and to the king's heir that provoked the most suspicion and anger on the part of the other nobility, which helped enable the Readeption of Henry VI in 1471 as well as the usurpation of Richard III in 1483.[22] Anger at the Woodvilles' closeness to the king contributed to the Earl of Warwick's rebellion against Edward in 1469. Vergil related the Earl of Warwick's manifesto against Edward IV in his chronicle, and among the Earl of Warwick's grievances he included the complaint that Edward IV "resolutely maketh more honorable accownt of new upstart gentlement than of the ancyent howses of nobylytie."[23] This statement is a clear reference to the Woodvilles, and illustrates how Warwick's jealousy and suspicion of the Woodville influence played a role in his decision to revolt against Edward.

The unpopularity of the Woodvilles also helped bring about Richard III's usurpation of the English throne in 1483, because they were perceived to have too much control over the Prince of Wales. While it is unclear how much more (if any more) Edward IV listened to his Woodville family members in comparison to his other advisors, more evidence survives to indicate that the Woodvilles did indeed wield the most influence over the Prince of Wales. Thomas More, writing his version of the usurpation of Richard III as a private literary exercise, stated that "to the governance and ordering of this young prince, at his sending thither, was there appointed Sir Anthony Woodville, Lord Rivers and brother unto the queen...adjoined were there unto him other of the same party, and, in effect, every one was he was nearest of kin unto the queen, so was planted next about the prince."[24] More goes on to state that this plan, undertaken by Queen Elizabeth, "was not unwisely devised, whereby her blood might of youth be rooted in the prince's favor."[25] Young Edward grew up surrounded by Woodville relatives and Woodville

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22. Ross, *Richard III*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), 40; Hicks, 83.

23. Vergil, *Three Books*, 119.

24. St. Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III and Selections from the English and Latin Poems*, ed. Richard S. Sylvester (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 14-15.

25. More, 15.

beneficiaries, so that (theoretically) when he became king, he would be grateful and generous toward them. The Queen, her brother, and the queen's cousin Richard Haute led his council in Wales, while at least eight other members of the council had Woodville connections.[26] Because control of the heir to the throne essentially translated to political power, in the current reign as well as the next, the Woodvilles' influence over the Prince of Wales was naturally envied. Since the Prince of Wales was underage, the Woodvilles' closeness poised the family to wield almost complete unlimited power after Edward IV's death.[27] The other nobility in England did not welcome this prospect. Ultimately, this influence contributed to the divisions among Edward IV's nobility that enabled Richard of Gloucester's usurpation as King.[28] More describes the origins of the plot to remove Edward V from his Woodville caretakers as a cooperative agreement between Lord Hastings, the Duke of Buckingham and Richard III, "these two [Lord Hastings and the Duke], not bearing each other so much love, as hatred both unto the queen's party, in this point accorded together with the Duke of Gloucester...".[29] This quotation illustrates how the unpopularity of the Woodvilles served to unite various members of the nobility against them, which made it more difficult to effectively protest Richard III as he positioned himself to seize the throne. Charles Ross claimed that "Richard of Gloucester's takeover of power in 1483 would not have been possible unless such deep divisions had existed among the ruling Yorkist nobility. For this Edward IV was largely responsible, especially through his promotion of the interests of the highly unpopular and unattractive queen."[30] Divisions among the English noblemen would have made it almost impossible to present a united front against a usurper, particularly when the success usurper in question meant the downfall of a despised faction. Because of the unpopularity of the queen and her family, a large population of the

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26. Laynesmith, 153.

27. Ross, *Richard III,* 40-41; Paul Murray Kendall, *Richard III* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, Inc., 1956), 197.

28. Ross, *Richard III,* 40.

29. More, 16-17.

30. Ross, *Richard III,* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), 40.

English nobility were not upset by Richard III's dramatic arrest of Edward V's uncle and half-brother and his assumption of custody for the boy, the first steps in his rapid journey to the throne of England. In this sense, the unpopularity of Elizabeth Woodville had serious political ramifications for the reigns of not only Edward IV, but also for his son. It cost the Woodvilles their security in England as well as the security of the English crown itself.

Elizabeth of York also wrought significant political consequences for the reign of her husband, Henry VII, due to the fact that her claim to the throne was much stronger than his. Her lineage would dictate much of her life as a child and her fate as a young adult. As Edward IV's eldest child and oldest daughter, Elizabeth of York was a valuable marriage commodity from her birth. For example, she was betrothed to the French king's son as part of the Treaty of Picquigny between Edward IV and Louis XI.[31] After the death of her brothers, Elizabeth was the heir presumptive to the Yorkist dynasty. Henry VII's claim to the throne through his Lancastrian connections was much weaker. His father was Henry VI's half-brother—they shared the same mother, Katherine of Valois. This discrepancy in their respective ancestries would have a profound impact on Henry VII's reign.

Elizabeth's royal lineage had two main implications for Henry VII, regarding his plans to challenge Richard III and his actions after he had won the crown. First, Elizabeth's role in Buckingham's Rebellion and the subsequent plotting against Richard III lent Henry VII's claim to the throne a sense of legitimacy. Buckingham's Rebellion was an insurrection against Richard III that took place in the fall of 1483, with the goal of deposing Richard III and replacing him with Henry Tudor (Henry VII). Without Elizabeth of York's supporting role in these early plans to overthrow Richard III, Henry VII might never have succeeded winning the throne. Even in the early planning stages of Buckingham's Rebellion, Elizabeth of York constituted a very significant part. Vergil describes the beginning of the plot as follows:

> ...a plot of new conspiracy was layd at London betwixt Elyzabeth the quene, wyfe to king Edward, and Margaret mother to erle Henry...yf yt might chaunce the bloode of king Henry the Sixth and of king Edward to be intermenglyd by affynytie, and so two most pernicious factions

31. Ross, *Edward IV*, 233.

> should be at once, by conjoynyng of both howses...that the time was now coom when as king Edwardes eldest dowghter might be geaven in maryage to hir soon Henry, and that king Rycherd....might easyly be dejectyd from all honor and bereft the realme.....[32]

In this manner, Elizabeth of York became a crucial element of the movement against Richard III, legitimizing Henry VII's claim to the throne. Charles Ross asserted that the proposed marriage between Henry and Elizabeth "diverted much lingering Yorkist sentiment to Henry Tudor....the projection of her marriage with Henry had been an essential element in winning support for the rebellion of 1483."[33] Many devoted Yorkists would have regarded Elizabeth as the true heir to the English crown after the deaths of her brothers; however, it was unthinkable (and most likely never even considered) that Elizabeth rule as queen regnant.[34] But with her marriage to Henry VII, the heir of Lancaster, she would still become a queen of England. Her part in the movement against Richard III attracted many Yorkists who otherwise would have been loath to support Henry VII. In this sense, Elizabeth of York played a most significant role in Henry VII's plans to overthrow Richard III.

Second, her claim to the throne significantly affected the steps Henry VII took to present his new dynasty as the rightful one, through the ways in which he dealt with his wife's stronger dynastic claim to the throne. Her ancestry was simultaneously a potential burden and a potential benefit for England's new king. First of all, since Elizabeth's claim to the throne was stronger than his, Henry VII had to avoid all appearances that he was assuming the throne based on his betrothed's blood.[35] This would have weakened his legitimacy as king. However, as Laynesmith puts it, "her [Elizabeth of York] claim to the English throne was too strong for Henry VII to risk allowing her to be married to anyone else."[36] As Elizabeth was Edward IV's heir, any husband of hers would have been able to challenge Henry VII based on his wife's blood. As has already been demonstrated, Elizabeth was an important part of Henry VII's plot to challenge Richard. But

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32. Vergil, *Three Books*, 195-196.

33. Ross, *Richard III*, 227.

34. Nancy Lenz Harvey, *Elizabeth of York, Mother of Henry VIII* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, Inc, 1973), 81-82.

35. Anne Crawford, *The Yorkists* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 151-152.

36. Laynesmith, 58.

although Henry VII had sworn to marry her while still plotting in Brittany, he did not marry her immediately after assuming the throne of England. He and Elizabeth were married in January 1486, four months after the Battle of Bosworth.

> ...in which cousail like a prince of iust faith and true of promes, detesting all intestine and cyuel hostilite, appointed a daye to ioyne in matrimony y lady Elizabeth heyre of the house of Yorke, with his noble personage heyre to y lyne of Lancastre: whiche thyng not onely reioysed and comforted the hartes of the noble and gentlemen of the realme, but also gayned the fauour and good myndes o fall the comen people, much extollyng and praysyng the kynges constant fidelyte and his polletique deuyce, thinkyng surely that the daye was now come that the seede of tumulteous faccions and the fountayne of ciuyle dissencion should be stopped, euacuate and clearly extinguished."[37]

Henry had to publicly decide on a wedding date, an indication that there was pressure on him, most likely from Parliament, to make good on his promise to marry Elizabeth of York. However, whatever his personal feelings toward Elizabeth may have been, Henry VII needed to make it clear that his kingship was not based on her own claim to the throne. This could have opened up a precedent for the future husbands of Elizabeth's four sisters. Instead, Henry dealt with the problem of Elizabeth's lineage by not marrying Elizabeth until he himself was crowned, effectively demonstrating that he was assuming the throne on different grounds than his betrothed's lineage. Also, in his letter to the Pope asking for dispensation to marry Elizabeth (they were related in the fourth degree), Henry VII avoided any reference to her blood when citing his reasons for marrying her.[38] In this way, he minimized (as much as possible) the complications Elizabeth's lineage presented, and the ways in which he did so had a significant impact on his actions during the first few months of his reign.

However, despite the logistical problem Elizabeth's lineage presented for Henry VII, her Yorkist blood became very useful for propaganda purposes regarding his new Tudor dynasty, the beneficial aspect of her ancestry brought to Henry VII. An example of how he used Elizabeth's lineage to his

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37. Hall, Edward, *Hall's Chronicle; Containing the History of England, during the Reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the 8th, 1548*, reprint ed. (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 423.

38. Crawford, *the Yorkists*, 152.

advantage is represented in the *Anglica Historia*, which, as a history commissioned by Henry VII, provides an excellent example of Tudor propaganda. When he described the marriage between Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, Vergil pronounced "It is legitimate to attribute this [the marriage] between divine intervention, for plainly by it all things which nourished the most ruinous factions were utterly removed, by it the two houses of Lancaster and York were united and from the union the true and established royal line emerged which now reigns."[39] Here, Vergil summarizes perfectly Henry VII's use of Elizabeth's lineage. He could present his choice of Elizabeth of York as his queen as a symbolic gesture that would unite the families of York and Lancaster and end the destructive conflict of the last few decades. Doing so acknowledged Elizabeth of York's Yorkist blood while also emphasizing that Henry VII's accession to the throne (and, simultaneously, the triumph of the Lancasters and the rise of the Tudors) had been designed and brought about by a divine (and immutable) set of circumstances. Arlene Okerlund interpreted the Tudor rose as a physical example of this kind of propaganda. She asserts "Henry VII, who understood symbolism better than anyone, surrounded the white rose of York with the outer petals of 'Lancastrian red' to create the Tudor rose, which became an icon of the dynasty that ended England's decades of bloodshed today known as the 'Wars of the Roses'."[40] Okerlund's analysis of the Tudor Rose demonstrates how Henry used Elizabeth's Yorkist blood as a tool with which to elevate himself as the rightful king of England. Without Elizabeth, his efforts in the early years of his reign to legitimize his kingship would have been quite different. Perhaps he would never have been able to win sufficient approval of the English people in order to govern effectively. In any case, Elizabeth of York and her lineage played an important role in shaping Henry VII's actions after the Battle of Bosworth, as well as contributing significantly to his efforts to win the English crown.

In the study of queens, it is too easy to forget they came from families of their own before assuming their roles in a king's family. Elizabeth Woodville and Elizabeth of York clearly illustrate the

39. Polydore Vergil, *Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, A.D 1485 – 1537* (London: The Royal Historical Society, 1950), 7.

40. Arlene Naylor Okerlund, *Elizabeth of York* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 53.

potential of a queen's family to impact the reign of her king in a significant manner. Both of them, in their subsequent positions as queens of England, precipitated some significant political consequences for Edward IV and Henry VII, representing the different implications of high noble or royal blood versus lower gentry birth in England. Elizabeth Woodville's experience as queen was characterized mostly by the familial interactions of and obligations due her large and lowborn family that affected her husband's reign, demonstrating just how fundamentally a queen's relatives could change the political scene in England. Meanwhile, Elizabeth of York's own claim to the throne through her Yorkist lineage clearly affected Henry VII's course to the throne of England and his actions after he had won the crown, representing the political and dynastic challenges that the Wars of the Roses presented to English monarchs during this politically unstable period. Both of these women clearly actualized the potential impact a queen could have on her husband's kingship, becoming key players in their own right during the final stages of the Wars of the Roses.

This study of Elizabeth Woodville and Elizabeth of York opens up some larger questions concerning these two queens and the study of queenship in general. First, it provides an analysis of the complicated genealogical politics of this period in such a way that emphasizes the role of women in politics. More specifically, the effect of queens and queenship in particular on these complex relationships deserves further examination. A queen's purpose was to serve her husband; her family could either positively or negatively affect her ability to do so. Furthermore, the lineage of a queen, as has been shown, dramatically affected not only the choice of a queen, but also determined her ultimate efficacy as a political tool for her husband. A closer study of the lineage of various other queens of England could enlighten historians as to the full implications for a king that the pedigree of his queen could have, particularly when it is so often taken for granted in biographical studies of queens. Elizabeth of York's own lineage had the unique characteristic of being at once a burden and a blessing to her husband. Meanwhile, her mother's noble lineage was so different than the usual standard for queens, that she and her entire family could never overcome their reputation as greedy upstarts. Their lowly ancestry was the basis for much of the unpopularity that would have such destructive consequences for Edward IV and his

family. Ultimately, these queens and the implications of their family connections would make a significant impact on the politics of late medieval England. Although as queens mother and daughter were quite different, both of them found their experiences, for better or worse, irrevocably shaped by their families, a true testament to the power of blood in one of the bloodiest conflicts in English history.

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